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A U.S. Initiative to Promote Democracy Around the World

Plagued by continuing recession and wrestling with budget deficits approaching \$200 billion, President Reagan doesn't need more criticism today. It is time to find something that his administration is doing right—well, almost right—and here it is: the Democracy Initiative.

Sometime this week, maybe today, the president is scheduled to push away his budget-battlers and sign a National Security Decision Document (NSDD) setting up a formal structure to oversee government and private efforts to promote democracy

Viewpoint

by Morton M. Kondracke

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— and counter totalitarianism around the world, and do so openly.

And when the president unveils his fiscal 1984 budget, it appears that the only set of federal programs which will avoid cut-backs are the various elements of the democracy effort. In fact, reportedly there will be \$65 million in new funding for programs to be managed by the U.S. Information Agency, the State Department and the Agency for International Development, and more yet for the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty.

These moves constitute first steps toward fulfillment of the proposal that Mr. Reagan made in probably the best speech of his presidency—his June 8, 1982, address to the British Parliament. He called for "a global campaign for democracy... a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of people."

Some critics charged at the time that Mr. Reagan was indulging in provocative hyperbole, but the democracies needed rallying, and America needs an upgrading of its overt programs to promote freedom and combat freedom's enemies.

The Soviet Union, it's clear, far out-distances U.S. efforts—not merely in money, but in personnel, attitudes and activity. In addition to KGB, diplomatic and international information projects, the Soviets provide thousands more scholarships to Third World young people than the U.S. does. The Soviets not only attend, but organize, world youth, nationalities and peace conferences. They aid local Communist parties around the world. They maintain contact with religious groups, political movements and labor organizations. They give high priority to the effort to sway world opinion.

Most of all, they think in terms of political initiative. Yuri Andropov no sooner took power than he launched what seems to be a 100-day peace offensive designed to further divide the Western alliance. Eventually, the U.S. probably will react, and perhaps effectively, as President Reagan has done twice before with major arms control speeches.

But the problem is that the U.S. almost always is reacting. If the U.S. had a full-blown democracy and public diplomacy program in place, it is Andropov who would have been faced with a Western peace blitz when he came into office.

But the U.S. will have to begin slowly. One of the four interagency groups set up under Mr. Reagan's NSDD is charged with getting the U.S. bureaucracy thinking about political initiatives. Two others will coordinate information programs and broadcasting. The fourth and most dubious, the Public Affairs/Nuclear Group, will attempt to counter the activities of the U.S. nuclear freeze movement.

There is no question that the government has a right and duty to try to persuade the people that its nuclear weapons policy is correct. But to establish the directorate for that effort under a structure dedicated to influencing foreign opinion is sure to inspire charges that the Reagan administration is indulging in domestic agit-prop. That could endanger bipartisan support for the rest of the democracy initiative.

So far, that support is strong. For example, the board of directors that manages Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty is no kooky, spooky right-wing cabal as during the Cold War, but an assemblage of some of the brightest democrats in America, including former USIA Director Frank Shakespeare and Michael Novak and Ben Wattenberg of the American Enterprise Institute, soon to be joined by author James Michener and AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland.

Similarly, after months of partisan squabbling, a creative group has been assembled to study the feasibility of establishing a private American foundation to do democracy's work abroad. The group is headed by Alan Weinstein of the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies and consists of representatives of the Republican and Democratic parties, the AFL-CIO and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

If the group's work is successful, the U.S. will have an equivalent of West Germany's three party political foundations, which have regional offices throughout the

world, maintain contact with many political groups and individuals that the West German government diplomatically can't and conduct training seminars for teachers, trade unionists, political organizers and sometimes even revolutionaries.

The most signal success of West Germany's Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, an arm of the Social Democratic Party, was the funneling of more than \$10 million to democratic forces in Portugal during the 1975 crisis, possibly saving that nation from Communist takeover. If the U.S. had tried anything of the kind, it would have had to do it through the CIA, with embarrassment all around if it had been exposed.

The U.S. has only one major counterpart to the German foundations—the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development, which trains unionists in Africa, Asia and Latin America and is especially active now in Central America. The American political parties and business groups traditionally have shown far less interest in foreign projects, but the democracy program is trying to find vehicles, and eventually money, to get them and other private groups involved.

As good an idea as the democracy initiative is, and as good as it is that the administration intends to fund it adequately, it is insufficient without two elements so far lacking in U.S. foreign policy: a global strategy and internal political tolerance.

All the free elections seminars and Afghanistan freedom conferences in the world will help only marginally unless the U.S. government knows where it wants to go and how it wants to use U.S. power to get there. The Soviets know that they want to split the West and gain influence (and eventually, domination) in the Third World. Soviet information policies and political action support the overall strategy, rather than substituting for it.

To maintain a consistent, long-term policy, the Soviet dictatorship does not need internal tolerance. We do, but we don't have it. Each incoming administration nowadays makes a habit of punishing foreign service officers who loyally carried out the orders of the previous administration. This purge pattern could destroy the democracy initiative—if, for example, one party decides to make a campaign issue out of the contacts that the other is making in the Third World. The only alternatives to a bipartisan democracy program are a covert program or none at all. As the world's leading democratic country, we can do better than that.